ART IN CINEMA.....SERIES ONE

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NOVEMBER 1, 1946.....CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL FILMS IN AMERICA

RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME.....Maya Deren
A STUDY IN CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CAMERA.....Maya Deren
GLEN FALLS SEQUENCE.....Douglass Crockwell
FIVE FILM EXERCISES.....John and James Whitney
THE POTTED PSALM.....Sydney Peterson
James Broughton

## Program Notes

The four films tonight (with the exception of A STUDY IN CHOREOGRAPHY) represent four widely separate approaches to the art of the film. GLEN FALLS SEQUENCE and the Whitney's FIVE FILM EXERCISES are both non-objective, but in the former, Crockwell is concerned primarily with intuitive expression through the play and hazard of his medium. The fluid imagery is left for each one of us to interpret in our own way. He would be the last to explain the "meaning" in the work. In this sense GLEN FALLS SEQUENCE may be loosely termed "surrealist" - but only in method. But in the Whitney films, the simultaneous creation of sound and image - a revolutionary new conception - is based upon a carefully preconsidered plan of forms very similar to those in musical composition. The technique, derived through experiments with a new creative instrument, is yet, by their own admission, in a preliminary stage.

Of the two films using realistic imagery, THE POTTED PSALM is, in part, analogous to GLEN FALLS SEQUENCE in attitude and approach. Although symbolism may often seem consciously chosen, the question of rational meaning is unimportant. Here also, the imagery stems from an intuitive, subconscious process. In the Deren film, again there is the careful working out of a preconceived theoretical study of space-time. The human figures are treated as abstract forms; their movements - accelerated or retarded by the camera, constitute an effort to create a filmic world with its own space, time, and reality.

RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME (1945-46) Conceived and directed by Maya Deren. Photography by Hella Heyman. Choreographic collaboration: Frank Westbrook. Principal performers: Rita Christiana and Frank Westbrook. A Ritual is an action that seeks the realization of its purpose through the exercise of form...the form is the meaning. Being a film ritual (the metamorphosis of the widow into the bride) it is achieved not in spatial terms alone, but in terms of a time created by the camera. Time here is not an emptiness to be measured by spatial activity which may fill it - time not only creates many of the actions and events but constitutes a special integrity of the form as a whole.

This film has erroneously come to be known as the "Anais Nin" film. Anais Nin does appear in the film, - she is the third woman in the doorway - but other than playing this small part, she has had no other hand in its conception or creation. (Acquired through the courtesy of Maya Deren)

A STUDY IN CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CAMERA (1945) By Maya Deren and Tally Beatty. (This film repeated tonight by popular request) Together, the dancer and space perform a dance which cannot exist but on film. (Acquired through the courtesy of Maya Deren)

GLEN FALLS SEQUENCE (1938-46) By Douglass Crockwell. (This film repeated tonight by popular request) Mr. Crockwell writes: "About eight years ago I set up an animation easel with the camera mounted overhead and the work area arranged much as a draughtsman's desk, except that the working area consisted of several movable layers of glass slightly separated. The basic idea was to paint continuing pictures on these various layers with plastic paint, adding at times and removing at times, and to a certain extent these early attempts were successful. This basic process was changed from time to time with varying results and I have still made no attempt yet to stabilize the method. Somewhat as a consequence of this has been the fragmentary character of the work produced. " (Acquired through the courtesy of Mr. Crockwell)

FIVE FILM EXERCISES (1943-44) By John and James Whitney. These revolutionary film studies are the result of a film technique - still imperfect - whereby sound and image may be created simultaneously. The Whitneys do not yet consider these results as works of art. Thus they have called them "exercises". Their effort is twofold: To create an instrument that might make accessible to the individual creator a more imposing element of the cinema medium, and the conviction that "the bi-sensory experience of auditory and visual form unified within a common time structure is intensified by the equal purity of both plastic and auditory elements."

Briefly, the sound is produced synthetically by photographing a controlled graph activated by a series of pendulums upon a sound track. The sound comes into being only as sound when projected through a sound projector. The visual forms are created by manipulation of paper cut-outs and re-shot on color film through an optical printer which affords unlimited flexibility. Photographs of this equipment hang on the left wall, center panel, of the Art in Cinema gallery show.

FIVE FILM EXERCISES (Continued)

FILM #1 (1943) Begins with a three beat announcement drawn out in time which thereafter serves as a figure to divide the four sections. Each return of this figure is more condensed, and finally used in reverse to conclude the film.

FILMS #2 & #3 (1944) Two short fragments resulting from experiments in controlling the mechanical development of the instrument.

FILM #4 (1944) The entire film is divided into four consecutive chosen approaches - the fourth section devoted to a reiteration and extension of the original material.

> Section One: Movement used primarily to achieve spatial depth. An attempt is made to delay sound in a proportional relationship to the depth of its corresponding image in the screen space - a near image is heard sooner than one in the distance. Upon this basis the screen space is assigned a tonal interval. Concludes with a frontal assault of all imagery used.
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> Section Two: Consists of four short subjects in natural sequence treated to an alternate development of contraction and expansion of their rhythms
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> Section Three: A fifteen second visual sequence which constitutes the leading idea is begun every five seconds after the fashion of the canon form in music. This section is built upon the establishing of complex tonal masses which oppose complex image masses, progressively shortened in duration.
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> Section Four: Begins with a statement in sound and image which at its conclusion is inverted and retrogresses to its beginning.

FILM #5 (1944) Opens with a short canonical statement of a theme upon which the entire film is constructed. The canon is repeated in contrasting variations by means of color. A second section poses the same image in deep film space. The image unfolds itself repeatedly, leaving the receding image to continue on smaller and smaller. (The foregoing notes condensed from complete discussions of these films supplied by John and James Whitney. Acquired through the courtesy of John and James Whitney.)

THE POTTED PSALM (1946) Written, produced and directed by Sydney Peterson and James Broughton. Photography by Sydney Peterson. Music by Francean Campbell. Shot in San Francisco during the summer of 1946, this film undertakes a visual penetration of the chaotic inner complexities of our post World War society, heretofore the preoccupation of serious modern writers. The film medium is potentially a more natural one than literature in dealing with the sub-verbal realms of the subconscious since it is more analogous to the dream world and its imagery. But the contents of the dream world are divorced from rationality and possess a necessary ambiguity. Thus the only possible approach to a film of this sort - indeed, in a sense, to any work of art - is to accept the ambiguity without interjection of the question: why? Since we all possess an infinite universe of ambiguity within us, these images are meant to play upon that world, and not our rational senses.

Mr. Peterson writes regarding this imagery: "From a field of dry grass, to the city, to the gravestone marked 'mother', and made more specific by the accident ('objective hazard') of a crawling caterpillar, to the form of a spiral, thence to a tattered palm and a bust of a male on a tomb, the camera, after a series of movements parodic of the sign of the cross, fastens on the profile of a young man looking into a store window. All these scenes are susceptible of a dozen different interpretations based upon visual connections. The connections may or may not be rational. In an intentionally realistic work the question of rationality is not a consideration. What is being stated has its roots in myth and strives through the chaos of commonplace data toward the kind of inconstant allegory which is the only substitute for myth in a world too lacking in such symbolic formulations."

The surface springboard from which this exploration is launched is a familiar enough condition to psychology - the Oedipus complex - which in this case reverses itself. Here, rather clinical in approach, we see it through the eyes of no one party concerned. It is the fact, and from here rises, or perhaps descends, the plunge into the ambiguity of the subconscious.

The music for this film, written by the Canadian composer, Francean Campbell, now living in San Francisco, is scored for clarinet, violin, piano, ocarina, xylophone, bells and percussion. The music is not meant to be an expression of the film's contents, but to be the composer's personal comment upon them.

- Frank Stauffacher

The next program in this series will be FANTASY INTO DOCUMENTARY

RIEN QUE LES HEURES by Alberto Cavalcanti
BERLIN: THE SYMPHONY OF A GREAT CITY by Walther Ruttmenn
THE CITY by Ralph Steiner and Willard van Dyke